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JAPAN: NEW MUSCLE FOR SELF-DEFENSE?

ANNCR:

JAPAN'S DEFENSE DIRECTOR HAS MOVED DECISIVELY TO SETTLE THE LONG-STANDING QUESTION OF HOW MUCH MILITARY MUSCLE IS NECESSARY FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE JAPANESE HOME ISLANDS.....AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM VOA'S JOHN SCHULZ IN TOKYO.

VOICE:

IT'S BEEN OVER A YEAR NOW SINCE MICHITA SAKATA TOOK OVER THE JOB AS DIRECTOR OF THE JAPANESE SELF-DEFENSE AGENCY. IN THAT TIME HE HAS PROVED TO BE A DYNAMIC AND ABLE ADMINISTRATOR FACED WITH THE UNENVIABLE TASK OF STREAM-LINING AND MODERNIZING HIS COUNTRY'S SELF-DEFENSE FORCES.

THE JAPANESE CONSTITUTION STATES THAT JAPAN WILL NEVER REARM ... A STATEMENT WHICH VIRTUALLY ALL JAPANESE AGREE WITH. BUT GOVERNMENT LEADERS IN THE RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY LONG AGO DETERMINED THAT THE CONSTITUTION DOES NOT PROHIBIT JAPAN FROM DEVELOPING A FORCE CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THE JAPANESE HOME ISLANDS. AND WHILE THE UNDERSTANDING WAS LONG AGO REACHED THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD PROVIDE A MAJOR PORTION OF THE PROTECTION FOR JAPAN, TO INCLUDE AMERICAN BASES, IT WAS ALSO UNDERSTOOD THAT JAPAN WOULD IN PART BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ITS OWN DEFENSE AS WELL.

NOT EVERYONE IN JAPAN AGREES THAT A SELF-DEFENSE FORCE IS LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL. AND THE TACTICAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEFENSE FORCE HAVE NEVER BEEN CLEARLY SPELLED OUT, SO THAT AMERICAN AND JAPANESE MILITARY LEADERS KNOW THEIR AREAS

OF RESPONSIBILITY IN THE EVENT OF A NATIONAL EMERGENCY. BUT BEGINNING LAST YEAR, JAPANESE AND AMERICAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BEGAN EXAMINING WAYS TO REALISTICALLY IMPLEMENT JOINT MILITARY COOPERATION AGREEMENTS FOR DEFENSE OF JAPAN AND THE FIRST WORKING LEVEL DISCUSSION OF ANY SUBSTANCE IS EXPECTED TO BE HELD IN A MATTER OF WEEKS. MOREOVER, MEMBERS OF THE SELF DEFENSE AGENCY HAVE BEEN QUIETLY WORKING TO INCREASE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF THE INADEQUACIES OF THE PRESENT SELF DEFENSE PROGRESS.

HOW EFFECTIVE HAVE THESE EFFORTS BEEN? A RECENT POLL SHOW THAT SEVENTY NINE PERCENT OF THE JAPANESE PEOPLE APPARENTLY SUPPORT MISTER SAKATA'S PROPOSED FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO STREAMLINE AND MODERNIZE THE SELF DEFENSE FORCES. BUT DESPITE WASHINGTON'S URGING AND PUBLIC SUPPORT IN JAPAN, ANY PLAN TO DEVELOP A TRULY EFFECTIVE ANTI-SUBMARINE FORCE AND AIR DEFENSE SYSTEM MUST CONFRONT THE MOST DEBILITATING REALITY OF ALL, THE ECONOMIC RECESSION.

OF ALL THE INDUSTRIALIZED NATIONS, JAPAN WAS PERHAPS THE MOST HARD HIT BY THE WORLDWIDE ENERGY CRISIS AND THE SUBSEQUENT RECESSION. IT'S GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT TOOK THE SHARPEST DIP AND ITS RECOVERY MAY TAKE THE LONGEST TIME. THESE FACTORS, MORE THEN ANY OTHER, AFFECT THE FUTURE OF THE DEFENSE AGENCY'S FIVE YEAR PLAN. ALREADY MOVES ARE BEING MADE TO CUT DOWN ON EXPENDITURES IN MANY AREAS. THUS DELAYING EVEN FURTHER THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TRULY EFFECTIVE SELF DEFENSE FORCE FOR THE JAPANESE HOME ISLANDS.

JS/PY